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T V V O
P E T I T I O N S
T O
T H E H O N O U R A B L E
C O U R T O F
P A R L I A M E N T
I N B E H A L F E O F
E P I S C O P A C Y.

ONE DELIVERED BY S^r THOMAS
ASTON from the County Palatine
of Chester.

THE OTHER FROM THE
Citties of L. and W.

Printed in the yeare 1641.



NOTICE

TO

ALL PERSONS

WHO ARE

INTERESTED

IN THE

ESTATE OF

THE

OF THE

OF THE



A PETITION DELIVERED INTO

The Lords *Spirituall* and *Temporall*, by
Sir THOMAS ASTON, Baronet,
from the County Palatine of CHESTER
concerning EPISCOPACIE.

To the High and Honorable Court of
PARLIAMENT.

*The Nobility, Knights, Gentry, Ministers,
Free-Holders, and Inhabitants of the
County Palatine of Chester, whose
names are subscribed in the
severall Schedules here-
unto annexed.*

Humbly shew,

THat whereas divers Petitions
have lately been carried about
this County, against the present
forme of Church-Government,
(and the hands of many persons of ordina-
ry quality solicited to the same, with pre-
tence to be presented to this Honorable
A 2 Assembly,)

Assembly:) which we conceiving not so much to ayme at reformation as absolute innovation of Government, & such as must give a great advantage to the Adversaries of our Religion, We held it our duty to disavow them all.

And humbly pray, that We incur no miscensure, if any such clamours have (without our privity) assum'd the name of the County.

We, as others, are sensible of the common Grievances of the Kingdome, & have just cause to rejoyce at, and acknowledge with thankfulness, the pious care which is already taken for the suppressing of the growth of Popery, the better supply of able Ministers, and the removing of all Innovation; and We doubt not but in your great Wisedomes, you will regulate the rigour of Ecclesiasticall Courts, to suit with the temper of our lawes, and the nature of Freemen.

Yet when We consider, that Bishops were instituted in the time of the Apostles;
That

That they were the great lights of the Church in all the first generall Councils; That so many of them sowed the seeds of Religion in their bloods, and rescued Christianity from utter extirpation in the Primitive Heathen persecutions; That to them we owe the redemption of the purity of the Gospel We now professe from Romish corruption; That many of them for the propagation of the truth, became glorious Martyrs; That divers of them (lately and yet living with us) have been so strong assertors of our Religion against its common enemy of Rome; And that their Government hath beene so long approved, so oft established by the Common and Statute Lawes of this Kingdome; And as yet nothing in their doctrine (generally taught) dissonant from the Word of God, or the Articles ratified by Law: In this case to call their Government a perpetuall vassalage, an intollerable bondage; And (*primâ facie & inauditâ alterâ parte*) to pray the present removal of them, or (as in some of their

A 3 Petitions)

Petitions) to seeke the utter dissolution and ruine of their Offices (as Antichristian:) We cannot conceive to relish of justice or charity, nor can We joyne with them.

But on the contrary, when We consider the tenor of such Writings, as in the name of Petitions are spread amongst the Common People; the tenents preached publicquely in Pulpits, and the contents of many printed Pamphlets, swarming amongst us; all of them dangerously exciting a disobedience to the established forme of Government, and their severall intimations of the desire of the power of the Keyes, and that their Congregations may execute Ecclesiasticall Censures within themselves: We cannot but expresse our just feares, that their desire is to introduce an absolute Innovation of Presbyterial Government, whereby We, who are now governed by the Canon and Civill Lawes, dispensed by twenty-six Ordinaries (easily responsall to Parliaments, for any deviation from the rule of Law,) conceive We should become exposed

sed to the meere arbitrary Government
of a numerous Presbytery, who together
with their ruling Elders will arise to neere
forty thousand Church-Governours, and
with their Adherents, must needs beare so
great a sway in the Common-wealth, that
if future inconvenience shall be found in
that Government, We humbly offer to con-
sideration, how these shall be reducible by
Parliaments, how consistent with a Monar-
chy, and how dangerously conducive to an
Anarchy, which We have iust cause to pray
against, as fearing the consequences would
prove the utter losse of Learning and
Lawes, which must necessarily produce an
extermination of Nobility, Gentry, and Or-
der, if not of Religion.

With what vehemency of spirit, these
things are prosecuted, and how plausibly
such popular infusions spread as incline to
a paritie, We held it our duty to represent
to this Honorable Assembly; And humbly
pray, that some such present course be taken,
as in your Wisedomes shall be thought fit,
to

to suppress the future dispersing of such dangerous discontents amongst the Common People. We having great cause to feare, that of all the distempers that at present threaten the wellfare of this State, there is none more worthy the mature and grave consideration of this Honorable Assembly, then to stop the Torrent of such Spirits before they swell beyond the bounds of Government: Then We doubt not but his Maiestie persevering in his gracious inclination to heare the complaints, and relieve the grievances of his Subjects in frequent Parliaments, it will so unite the Head and the Body, so indissolubly cement the affections of his people to our Royall Sovereigne, that without any other change of Government, He can never want revenue, nor We iustice.

We

*We have presumed to annex a Coppy of a
Petition (or Libell) dispersed , and certaine
positions preacht in this County, which We con-
ceive imply matter of dangerous consequence to
the peace both of Church and State. All which
We humbly submit to your great Iudgments,
praying they may be read.*

And shall ever pray, &c.

Subscribed to this Petition,

Foure Noblemen.

*Knight 'Baronets, Knights and Esquires,
fourescore and odde.*

Divines, threescore and ten.

Gentlemen, three hundred and odde.

*Freeholders and other Inhabitants , above
six thousand.*

All of the same County.

*The Anti-Petition, or Answer to this, is a base
Libell and a forgerie.*

B

TO



TO THE
HONORABLE.
THE

Knights, Cittizens, &c.

The humble Petition of the Citties
of L. and W.

Humbly sheweth,

THAT whereas there hath of late a Petition subscribed by many (who pretend to be Inhabitants of these Citties) been delivered, received, and read in this HONORABLE House, against the ancient, present, and by Law established Government of the Church, and that not so much for the Reformation of Bishops, as for the utter subversion and extirpation of Episcopacy

pacy it selfe; Wee whose names are underwritten, to shew there be many, and those of the better sort of the Inhabitants of these Citties otherwise and better minded, doe humbly represent unto this Honorable House, these considerations following.

I. That Episcopacy is as ancient as Christianity it selfe in this Kingdome.

II. That Bishops were the chiefe instruments in the Reformation of this Church against Popery, and afterwards the most eminent Martyrs for the Protestant Religion, and since, the best and ablest Champions for the defence of it.

III. That since the Reformation, the times have been very peaceable, happy, and glorious, notwithstanding Episcopall Government in the Church: and therefore that this Government can be no cause of our unhappinesse.

IV. We conceive that not only many Learned, but diverse other Godly persons would be much scandalled and troubled in Conscience, if the Government of Episco-

pacy, conceived by them to be an Apostolical Institution, were altered: & since there is so much care taken, that no man should be offended in the least Ceremony, we hope there will be some, that such mens Consciences may not be pressed upon, in a matter of an higher nature and consequence, especially considering that this Government by Episcopacy, is not only lawfull and convenient for edification, but likewise suitable and agreeable to the Civill policie and Government of this State.

V. That this Government is lawfull it appears by the immediate, universall & constant practise of all the Christian World, grounded upon Scripture, from the Apostles time to this last Age, for above 1500 yeares together: It being utterly incredible, if not impossible, that the whole Church for so long a time, should not discover by Gods word this Government to be unlawfull, if it had been so. To which may be added, that the most learned Protestants, even in those very Churches which now are not governed

governed by Bishops, doe not only hold the Government by Episcopacy to be lawfull, but wish that they themselves might injoy it.

Againe, that the Government by Episcopacy is not only lawfull, but convenient for edification, & as much, or more conducing to Piety and devotion then any other, it appeares, because no modest man denies, that the Primitive times were most famous for Piety, Constancy, & Perseverance in the Faith, notwithstanding more frequent and more cruell persecutions then ever have been since; and yet it is confessed, that the Church in those times was govern'd by Bishops.

Lastly, That the Government of the Church by Episcopacy, is most suitable to the frame and forme of the Civill Government here in this Kingdome, it appeares by the happy & flourishing Union of them both, for so long a time together; Whereas no man can give us an assurance, how any Church Government besides this (whereof

We have had so long an experience) will
suit and agree with the Civill policie of
this State. And We conceive it may be of
dangerous consequence, for men of settled
fortunes to hazzard their estates, by making
so great an alteration, and venturing upon a
new forme of Government, whereof nei-
ther We, nor our Ancestors have had any
tryall, or experience; especially considering
that those, who would have Episcopacy to
be abolished, have not yet agreed, nor (as
We are verily perswaded) ever will or can
agree upon any other common forme of
Government to succeed in the roome of it,
as appeares by the many different and con-
trary draughts, and platformes they have
made & published, according to the several
humors and sects of those that made them.
Whereas, seeing every great alteration in a
Church or State, must needs be dangerous,
it is just and reasonable that whosoever
would introduce a *new forme* in stead of an
old one, should be obliged to demonstrate
and make it evidently appeare aforehand,
that

that the Government he would introduce, is proportionably so much better, then that he would abolish, as may recompence the losse we may sustaine, and may be worthy of the hazzard we must run, in abolishing the one, and in introducing and settling of the other. But this We are confident can never be done, in regard of this particular.

And therefore our humble and earnest request to this *Honorable House* is, that as well in this consideration, as all the other aforesaid, We may still enjoy that Government, which most probably holds its Institution from the *Apostles*, and most certainly its plantation with our *Christian Faith it selfe* in this Kingdome, where it hath ever since flourished, and continued for many Ages without any interruption or alteration: whereby it plainly appeares, that as it is the most excellent Government in it selfe; so it is the most sutable, most agreeable, and every way most proportionable to the Civill constitutions and temper of this State. And therefore We pray and hope will alwayes,

ways be continued, and preserved in it & by it, notwithstanding the abuses and corruptions which in so long tract of time through the errors or negligences of men may have crept into it: Which abuses and corruptions being all of them (what and how many soever they may be) but meere-ly accidentall to Episcopacy; We conceive and hope, there may be a Reformation of of the one, without destruction of the other.

*Which is the bumble suit
of
Ten thousand thousand.*

